

2004 Deer Harvest Forecast

Within the confines of their declining habitat, most California deer herds are giving hunters cause for optimism in 2004. An obvious exception this year is the series of fires that ravaged some areas of Southern California, and the continuing fire risk in other areas.

Although devastating in nature, the fires, which occurred primarily in zones D11, D14, D15, and D16, should result in higher numbers of deer in these areas within the next few years. Hunters should continue to expect fire related closures in these zones, as well as in D13 and D11, because significant risks still exist in these areas despite what burned last year.

The state is divided into 11 "deer assessment units." Each DAU represents a group of deer herds (and zones) that live in similar habitats and experience similar weather patterns that collectively result in similar herd performance.

North/South Central Coast (DAUs 1 & 2)

DAUs 1 and 2 combined include the southern and northern portions of the huge Zone A, as well as Zone D13 and Zone B4. The overall deer population in these DAUs is estimated at 181,596, down from an estimate of 200,704 animals the previous year.

Last year the Zone A harvest was estimated at 9,119 bucks, down slightly from the estimated 2002 harvest of 10,223. As for Zone D13, the estimated hunter harvest in 2003 was 213. Zone B4 showed an increase in the harvest last year, with hunters taking as estimated 507 bucks compared to 489 the year before.

Northwestern California (DAU 3)

This DAU takes in zones B1 through B6, minus B4, and contains some of the best blacktail deer range in the West. The estimated deer population in this DAU last year was 142,097, earning it the nickname among wildlife biologists of "the deer factory."

As usual, Zone B1 yielded the biggest estimated hunter harvest, at 2,713 bucks. But that figure is down from the previous year's estimate of 3,553. The total harvest for this DAU 3 in 2003 is estimated at 7,187.

Cascade/North Sierra (DAU 4)

This DAU includes all four C zones, where the 2003 deer population estimate was 35,260. Like most of the non-premium hunts, the majority of bucks taken from these zones were forked horns, with one exception. About 46 percent of the deer taken from Zone C2 last year were three-point bucks. The total kill in the C zones for 2003 was estimated at 1,297 bucks, compared to 1,636 in 2002.

Northeast California (DAU 9)

Zones included in this DAU are X1, X2, X3a, X3b, X4, X5a and X5b, with an estimated deer population of 19,020. This is one of the most desirable areas of the state to hunt deer, and tags are issued by lottery drawing only.

The highest percentage of bucks taken from zones X2, X3b, X4 and X5b were three-point bucks. The total estimated harvest for all zones in DAU 9 was 992.

Northeast Sierra/East Sierra (DAUs 10 & 11)

Five of the state's remaining X zones, X6a, X6b, X7a, X7b and X8, are situated in DAU 10 from Alpine County north. The total deer population estimate for this DAU in 2003 was 7,967. Meanwhile, X9a, X9b, X10 and X12 are in DAU 11 with a total deer population estimate of 10,720.

What these DAUs lack in deer numbers, they make up for in antler size, making it another premium hunt area where tags are awarded on a lottery basis.

One-third of the bucks taken from Zone X8 had four antler points, and another third were three-point bucks. Zone X7a yielded mostly four-point bucks, while Zone X10 delivered the highest percentage of bucks with more than four antler points than any zone in the state.



Trevor Stumm, accompanied by his father, Bob, poses with his prize from a J11 hunt.

Central/Southern Sierra (DAUs 5 & 6)

DAU 5 contains five D zones: D3, D4 and D5, which are all covered by the same tag; and zones D6 and D7. The estimated deer population for this DAU was 94,860 in 2003, down from the previous year's estimate of 104,036. Meanwhile, DAU 6 is home to zones D8, D9 and D10. This DAU has also seen a decrease in estimated deer numbers, down to 16,310 from an estimated 20,320 in 2002.

South Coast/Desert (DAUs 7 & 8)

These two DAUs encompass all of the remaining D zones, except Zone D13, as well as Zone X9c. The overall population estimate for these DAUs is 14,114, which is down substantially from the previous year's estimate of 19,010. The harvest for these zones totaled 839 animals, which included a fair number of three-point bucks.

Note: Population figures are based on a three-year average and vary due to conditions during surveys and final harvest numbers.

2003 Preliminary Deer Harvest Antler Class Data

The following table shows the percentage by antler class of forked horn or better bucks and the total reported buck harvest for zones and hunts (a).

Zone or Hunt	2 Point Buck	3 Point Buck	4 Point Buck	4+ Point Buck	Point Total Buck Kill	Zone or Hunt	2 Point Buck	3 Point Buck	4 Point Buck	4+ Point Buck	Total Buck Kill
Archery Only 1 (b)	50.4%	31.0%	13.3%	5.3%	113	Hunt A15	33.3%		66.7%		3
Archery Only 2 (b)	60.2%	25.8%	12.9%	1.1%	93	Hunt A16	23.1%	38.5%	34.6%	3.8%	26
A Zone (South-Unit 110)	68.3%	23.4%	7.1%	0.8%	1,938	Hunt A17	100.0%				1
A Zone (North-Unit 160)	56.9%	32.1%	9.6%	1.2%	2,065	Hunt A18	50.0%		50.0%		2
Zone B1	42.0%	37.8%	18.1%	1.7%	1,268	Hunt A19					0
Zone B2	52.1%	32.2%	12.5%	2.7%	1,113	Hunt A20	41.9%	45.2%	9.7%	3.2%	31
Zone B3	51.5%	31.4%	14.6%	1.7%	239	Hunt A21	50.0%		50.0%		2
Zone B4	45.6%	38.7%	14.7%	0.5%	204	Hunt A22	80.0%	20.0%			5
Zone B5	47.5%	38.0%	12.5%	1.9%	263	Hunt A24	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	8
Zone B6	46.8%	32.1%	18.6%	2.4%	468	Hunt A25	40.0%	40.0%	20.0%		5
Zone C1	48.3%	38.4%	9.9%	2.6%	151	Hunt A26	18.2%	54.5%	18.2%	9.1%	11
Zone C2	35.9%	46.1%	14.1%	3.9%	128	Hunt A27		50.0%	50.0%		2
Zone C3	47.2%	40.8%	9.6%	2.3%	218	Hunt A30		60.0%	40.0%		5
Zone C4	50.9%	30.9%	16.3%	1.9%	375	Hunt A31	50.0%	50.0%			10
Zone D3	46.0%	31.4%	15.9%	5.3%	678	Hunt A32					0
Zone D4	46.1%	29.9%	20.8%	1.9%	154	Hunt G1	46.5%	37.8%	14.4%	1.3%	312
Zone D5	50.8%	30.5%	14.2%	2.9%	1,123	Hunt G3	11.1%	22.2%	61.1%	5.6%	18
Zone D6	50.1%	32.3%	14.7%	2.6%	694	Hunt G6	39.1%	26.1%	26.1%	8.7%	23
Zone D7	53.3%	28.5%	14.6%	3.4%	615	Hunt G7			100.0%		2
Zone D8	56.7%	28.1%	12.5%	2.7%	263	Hunt G8					6
Zone D9	53.3%	30.0%	14.4%	2.2%	90	Hunt G9					0
Zone D10	67.7%	19.4%	12.9%		31	Hunt G10	41.7%	25.0%			12
Zone D11 (c)	62.4%	32.9%	4.7%		149	Hunt G11					2
Zone D12	34.3%	38.6%	22.9%	2.9%	70	Hunt G12	60.0%	20.0%	20.0%		5
Zone D13 (c)	61.0%	26.7%	9.6%	0.7%	146	Hunt G13					3
Zone D14 (c)	53.5%	27.9%	10.5%	4.7%	86	Hunt G19	60.0%		20.0%		5
Zone D15 (c)	35.7%	35.7%	21.4%	7.1%	14	Hunt G21	60.0%	40.0%			5
Zone D16 (c)	60.2%	32.7%	5.1%		98	Hunt G37	7.7%	30.8%	46.2%	15.4%	13
Zone D17	21.7%	43.5%	26.1%	8.7%	46	Hunt G38	68.4%	15.8%	5.3%	10.5%	19
Zone D19 (c)	71.1%	28.9%			38	Hunt M3	3.3%	30.0%	53.3%	10.0%	30
Zone X1	40.1%	39.1%	18.4%	2.3%	299	Hunt M4					0
Zone X2	20.5%	38.5%	30.8%	7.7%	39	Hunt M5			50.0%	50.0%	2
Zone X3a	37.5%	27.3%	29.5%	4.5%	88	Hunt M6					0
Zone X3b	36.2%	44.7%	14.9%	4.3%	188	Hunt M7	44.4%	22.2%			9
Zone X4	34.4%	41.1%	18.9%	4.4%	90	Hunt M8			100.0%		1
Zone X5a	50.0%	33.3%	11.1%	5.6%	18	Hunt M9		25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	4
Zone X5b	21.4%	39.3%	32.1%	7.1%	28	Hunt M11	25.0%	50.0%	16.7%	8.3%	12
Zone X6a	36.2%	31.9%	21.3%	9.6%	94	Hunt MA1			25.0%		4
Zone X6b	36.6%	30.5%	26.8%	6.1%	82	Hunt MA3	33.3%	44.4%	11.1%		9
Zone X7a	26.1%	32.6%	41.3%		46	Hunt J1	25.0%	58.3%	8.3%		12
Zone X7b	42.2%	24.4%	31.1%	2.2%	45	Hunt J3	33.3%	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	6
Zone X8	30.0%	33.3%	33.3%	3.3%	30	Hunt J4	20.0%	30.0%	50.0%		10
Zone X9a	38.3%	39.7%	21.3%	0.7%	141	Hunt J7					0
Zone X9b	34.5%	48.3%	13.8%	3.4%	29	Hunt J8	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%		4
Zone X9c	24.1%	48.1%	27.8%		54	Hunt J9					0
Zone X10	47.1%	35.3%	5.9%	11.8%	17	Hunt J10	45.5%	36.4%	9.1%		11
Zone X12	36.3%	30.6%	27.4%	4.0%	124	Hunt J11		100.0%			1
Hunt A1	49.4%	34.9%	13.3%	2.4%	166	Hunt J12			100.0%		5
Hunt A3	30.8%	53.8%	15.4%		26	Hunt J13	100.0%				1
Hunt A4	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	5	Hunt J14	75.0%	25.0%			8
Hunt A5		50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	4	Hunt J15	66.7%	33.3%			3
Hunt A6	50.0%	37.5%		12.5%	8	Hunt J16		100.0%			1
Hunt A7	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%		6	Hunt J17	100.0%				1
Hunt A8		50.0%	50.0%		2	Hunt J18					1
Hunt A9		100.0%			2	Hunt J19	36.4%	36.4%	18.2%		11
Hunt A11	38.2%	32.4%	26.5%	2.9%	34	Hunt J20	28.6%	42.9%			7
Hunt A12	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%		6	Fund-Raising Tags ^(b)	0.0%	40.0%	20.0%	40.0%	5
Hunt A13	66.7%			33.3%	3						
Hunt A14	57.1%	14.3%	28.6%		7	STATEWIDE:	50.9%	32.1%	14.0%	2.4%	15,306

(a) Table does not include percentages for unclassified and spike bucks, or Private Lands Management Area (PLM) deer kill, so total percentages may not add up to 100%.

(b) Archery Only and Fund-raising Tags are listed separately, and not included within the individual zone or hunt of kill.

(c) Zone kill was substantially lower than prior years due to wildfires and forest closures imposed by the US Forest Service in 2002 and 2003.